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## Do German English Language Learners Know English Homophones?

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### Abstract

There are many ubiquitous words in English language that either sound or are spelt alike which cause ambiguity at the lexical level to learners of English. This could lead to a serious difficulty in communication in general as well as in translation or interpretation in particular. As far as German learners are concerned, this study explores the reasons beyond this ambiguity for undergraduate German students studying International Technical Translation. It was revealed that the negative effect of their L1 and their vocabulary deficiency are the main reasons for their low performance in both recognition and production homophones tests.

**Key words:** Homophones; Homonymy; Error analysis; Interlingual transfer; Intralingual transfer

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### INTRODUCTION

Many English language learners do not realize a very obvious phenomenon which causes misunderstanding and lack of communication. This semantic phenomenon is represented by homonymy. The usage of the correct words appears to be the most significant feature of communication. Interpretation or translation may be misunderstood and confused because there are two unrelated meanings for one lexical item in the same sentence causing semantic and lexical errors.

Semantic and lexical errors research had been in its infancy for many years due to linguistic research on syntax and phonology which may have promoted conditions in which this field was thought to be a less significant aspect of learning a second language. Another reason for this could be that there may have been an original opinion that considerable fundamental explanation and generality is possible within syntax, where relations are limited, but this is less probable within lexis, where relations are in theory unlimited (Carter, 1987; Channell, 1981; James 1998; Laufer, 1997; Zughoul & Abdul-Fattah, 2003). Another main cause for this scarcity mentioned by Zughoul (1991) is the verity that lexis is an intrinsically complicated and challenging area which does not offer itself as straightforwardly as phonology and syntax to quantification and systematic analysis.

If a learner hears the sentence "I'll meet you by the *bank*" it may mean I'll meet you by the financial institution or I'll meet you by the riverside." (Fromkin et al., 2014). Thus, the ambiguity is due to the word *bank*, which can be considered a source of confusion for language learners. In fact, the problem lies in the words that have the same pronunciation and spelling but different meanings, i.e. homonyms. Another confusing semantic phenomenon which falls under the umbrella of the term homonyms is homophones.

Has a learner ever wondered which variation of the word / bæə / to use? This word can be *bare* which means to carry or to tolerate; on the other hand, it can be a *bear* which means omnivorous animal with a large head and shaggy coat. Both words sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings. Such words are tricky; many other words like them are called homophones. English language learners have to be familiar with homophones because spelling can change the entire meaning of a sentence. Consequently, homophones present a severe impediment to language learners.

In order to understand the nature and process of language cognition and the acquisition, information has to be obtained by analyzing learners' knowledge of numerous multi-semantic lexical units, which will help in developing strategies for language teaching. In this light, an urgent need arises for inspecting if undergraduate German students studying International Technical Translation in Germany have any difficulty in choosing the correct homophone to complete the meaning of a sentence, in addition to their ability writing the right homophone when they were asked to. It is expected that information obtained from this study will help in gaining some insight into the phenomenon to overcome the hurdles of sense disambiguation of words. The significance of the present study is also derived from the fact that homophony is the source of ambiguity in the case of German learners. Thus, it should be studied and examined.

This inspection leads to find answers for the questions of this research which are the followings.

- a) Are undergraduate German students studying International Technical Translation able to recognize and produce correctly English homophones?
- b) What are the reasons beyond those undergraduates' errors if errors occurred?
- c) What are the suitable solutions posited to deal with such errors?

## 1. HOMONYMY

Learning lexical items mean learning both their sounds and their meanings. This causes difficulty for learners in deciding whether words are the same or different. When words have different pronunciation but have the same meaning, such as *sofa* and *couch*, they are different words. Similarly, words have the same pronunciation but different meanings, such as *tale* and *tail*, are different words too. Moreover, words have the same pronunciation and spelling but have different meanings as *bat* the animal and *bat* for hitting baseballs are different words (Fromkin et al., 2014). These linguistic phenomena need to be discussed in order to clarify them.

It is a vital point to recognize the difference between three similar-looking linguistic technical terms that are used in the semantic field. These are homonyms, homophones, and homographs which cause a kind of confusion and controversy around their definitions.

Homonymy is originated from the Greek word *homo* which means "same" and *onym* which means 'name' (www.oxforddictionaries.com). When words are examined, their pronunciation or spelling, or both will be examined too. Therefore, it is an essential point to refer to form of words in order to examine them. The term homonymy is a semantic term used to represent lexical items which have either the same phonological properties, or graphological properties, or both but different meanings

(Alm-Arvis, 2011; Allan et al., 2010; Asher, 1994; Bussmann, 1996; Crystal, 2003, 2010; Curse, 2006, 2011; Gramley & Pätzold, 1992; Finish, 2000; Fromkin et al., 2014, 2011; Hatch & Brown, 1995; Kreidler, 1998; Yule, 2014).

Since there are several types of homonymy as homonyms have the same spelling but different meanings as the word *wind* [waind] "the clock" and *wind* [wind] "a current of air". Another kind has the same pronunciation but different spelling and different meanings, for example, *site* [sait] "location" and *sight* [sait] "vision". The last type has the same spelling and same pronunciation but different meanings, for instance, *ear* [iə] "the organ of hearing" and *ear* [iə] "of corn". A detailed classification is required to explain these types.

Homonyms are the first type of homonymy to be discussed in this study. Homonym is a semantic relation that exists between words when they have the same spelling and pronunciation i.e. the same form or shape but with unrelated meanings (Allan et al., 2010; Crystal, 2010; Curse, 2006, 2011; Fromkin et al., 2014; Löbner, 2002; Lyons, 1995; Yule, 2014). Homonyms can generate uncertainty (Curse, 2006, 2011; Fromkin et al., 2014) as the classical example of the word *bank* 'I will meet you by the bank'. The word *bank* can be understood either as the bank of a river or a financial institution (Yule, 2014; Curse, 2006, 2011). The ambiguity occurred because of the two words bank with two different meanings that are not related, as a result, these lexemes would be listed in different entries as distinct words with different meanings in dictionaries (Alm-Arvis, 2011; Crystal, 2010; Curse, 2006, 2011; Hatch & Brown, 1995). Since homonyms are lexemes that have different meanings, etymologies, and histories, there are no perceptible semantic connections between them. As for their forms, they have coincidentally ended up being the same (Alm-Arvis, 2011; Bussmann, 1996; Kreidler, 1998; Yule, 2014).

Consequently, linguists face a difficulty in distinguishing between homonymy and polysemy. Homonymy as defined earlier is lexemes of the same form having unrelated meanings, whereas polysemy according to Crystal (2003, p.359) is "a term used in semantic analysis to refer to a lexical item which has a range of different meanings, e.g. *plain* = 'clear', 'unadorned', 'obvious'." At the theoretical level the distinction between polysemous words and homonyms is clear because polysemous lexeme is a single dictionary entry with a numbered of different meanings of the lexeme, while "homophonous lexemes" (Kreidler, 1998, p.52) are separate dictionary entries (Allan et al., 2010; Crystal, 2010; Finch, 2000; Fromkin et al., 2014; Kreidler, 1998; Lyons, 1977). For example, the words *head*, *foot*, *face*, and *run* are examples of polysemy, whereas the words *bank*, *mole*, *sole*, and *mail* are examples of homonyms (Yule, 2014). The relationship between them is merely accidental.

In actual fact, conversely, the distinction between homonyms and polysemous words is often challenging. Therefore, lexicographers often resolve this challenge by deciding on the basis of etymology, which is sometimes inevitably irrelevant, and actually separate lexical entries are necessary in some cases when two lexemes have the same historical origin (Allan et al., 2010; Cowie, 2009; Crystal, 2010; Finch, 2000; Lyons, 1977). The word *pupil*, for example, *pupil* “part of the eye” and *pupil* “student” are listed as different words despite the fact that they have a common origin, and then they are polysemic according to the etymological criterion. Nevertheless, at present they are semantically unrelated and lexicographers treat them as homonyms and classify them as separate lexical items (Crystal, 2010; Finch, 2000; Kreidler, 1998). Similarly, this problem exists with *sole* “fish” and *sole* “shoe” (Finch, 2000; Lyons, 1995), *flower* and *flour*, the verb *to poach* “a way of cooking in water” and *to poach* “to hunt animals on another person’s land” (Kreidler, 1998). There is frequently a conflict between etymological criterion and present-day perception in coping with instances of polysemy and homonymy.

A connected semantic term for homonym is heteronym. According to Crystal (2003) and Fromkin et al. (2014), heteronym stands for words which represent partial homonymy, they are different in meaning, but are identical either in phonological properties or graphological properties. As the words “*threw* and *through*” (Crystal, 2003, p.217), these words are identical in sound [θru:] but are different in spelling. Another example is the word “*bass* meaning either ‘lower tone’ [bes] or ‘a kind of fish’ [bæs]” (Fromkin et al., 2014, p.581). The former example represents homophones and the latter stands for homographs.

Homographs are the second type of homonyms, they are words that share the same written form but do not share the same meanings (Allan et al., 2010; Asher, 1994; Crystal, 2003; Fromkin et al., 2014; Hatch and Brown, 1995; Gramley and Pätzold, 1992). Additionally, homographs do not share the same pronunciation (Allan et al., 2010; Bussman, 1996; Crystal, 2010; Cruse, 2006; Kreidler, 1998). This definition can be illustrated in such pairs *tear* ‘in clothing’ and *tear* “from the eye” (Fromkin et al., 2014); the first word is pronounced [tɛə] while the other word is pronounced [tiə].

The last type of homonyms is homophones. They are lexemes that have the same phonological form i.e. pronunciation but have different meanings (Allan et al., 2010; Asher, 1994; Bussmann, 1996; Crystal, 2003; Finch, 2000; Fromkin et al., 2014; Gramley & Pätzold, 1992; Yule, 2014). In addition to this definition, homophones have different spelling (Crystal, 2010; Cruse, 2006; Kreidler, 1998; Palmer, 1984; Richards and Schmidt, 2010). Examples of homophones as such pair of words “*lead* (metal) and *led* (past tense of lead)” (Cruse, 2006,

p.80), both words are pronounced [lɛd] but each lexeme has a different meaning.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Participants

The participants of the study were undergraduate Germans from Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences in Germany, studying International Technical Translation. The students numbered 38 in total and belonged to third and fourth year. First year students were not chosen because their courses were only introductory classes and they had not finished them, moreover second year students were not chosen either as they were supposed to spend this year studying abroad at a university of their choice. The participants’ gender was not taken into consideration when the study was applied as the number of male students was only 8, whereas the number of female students was 30.

The participants were tested in their university, while attending lectures in their department, during the second term of 2014.

### 2.2 Research Instrument and Procedure

A recognition homophone test and a production homophone test were administered to 38 undergraduate German participants in their classrooms in order to evaluate their knowledge of English homophones.

As for the recognition homophone test, one sentence was constructed for each of the 20 homophones so that the sentence could only be completed with the contextually appropriate homophone (e.g. I bought a cinnamon *role* / *roll* for breakfast.) Participants were asked to circle the homophone that fit correctly with the meaning of the sentence. Whereas the production homophone test, participants were asked to write a meaningful homophone for each given word of the 20 words. They were asked not to discuss anything with anyone and not to use any dictionary (see Appendices A and B).

Before proceeding on with the tests, participants were instructed in German to make sure that they understood the instructions of the two tests. In addition, they were reminded of the definition of homophones and provided with an example of homophones. They were instructed not to guess if they had no idea about the answers. Each test was then corrected and marked out of 20, the scoring being either correct (1 point) or incorrect/blank (0 point).

## 3. DATA ANALYSIS

The participants underwent recognition homophone test and production homophone test to determine if they were able to recognize and produce English homophones correctly. In order to be able to find answers for this hypothesis, descriptive statistics for the scores obtained from the participants’ performances on both recognition

homophone test (Test 1) and production homophone test (Test 2). This was followed by calculating the degree of paired samples of correlation between these two sets of scoring using person product correlation coefficient. In addition, a paired *t*-test was conducted to compare the scores of participants in the recognition homophone test and the production homophone test.

As for a general comparison between the students' results of the recognition homophone test and their scores of the production homophone test, it is clear that there was a significant difference between their results in both tests as it is represented below in Table 1 according to the comparison for mean scores for the students. There was a significant difference in the scores for the recognition homophone test ( $M=14.61$ ,  $SD=2.96$ ) and the scores of the production homophone test ( $M= 7.42$ ,  $SD= 4.23$ ).

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Statistics Comparison of Mean Scores for Students in Both Tests**

	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Recognition test	14.61	38	2.96410	.48084
Production test	7.42	38	4.23391	.68683

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the students' scores of the recognition homophone test (Test 1) and their scores of the production homophone test (Test 2). There was a positive correlation between two variables (recognition

homophone test and production homophone test),  $r = 0.948$ ,  $n = 38$ ,  $p = .000$  as Table 2 below represents the paired samples correlations between the two tests.

**Table 2**  
**Paired Samples Correlations Between Recognition and Production Homophone Tests**

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Test 1 & Test 2	38	.948	.000

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the participants' scores of the recognition homophone test (Test 1) and their scores of the production homophone test (Test 2). The results are represented in Table 3 below; the obtained *t*-value of (25.9), the degrees of freedom which are (37), and the statistical significance (2-tailed *p*-value) of the paired *t*-test which is (0.000), as the *p*-value is less than 0.05 (i.e.,  $p < .05$ ), it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the two variables (Test 1 and Test 2). In other words, the difference between the scores of the participants is not equal to zero

These results suggest that the participants' performance in the recognition homophone test (Test 1) was higher than their performance in the production homophone test (Test 2). In order to examine this performance, the results of the participants' total performance of the recognition homophone and production homophone tests can be summarized in Table 4 below.

**Table 3**  
**Paired Samples T-Test Results for Recognition Homophone Test and Production Homophone Test**

Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	Paired differences		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
			95% confidence interval of the difference				
			Lower	Upper			
Test 1 - Test 2	7.18421	1.70619	.27678	6.62340	25.956	37	.000

**Table 4**  
**Participants' Achievement of the Recognition Homophone and Production Homophone Tests**

Test	No. of correct responses	Percentage	No. of incorrect responses	Percentage
Test 1	551	72.5%	209	27.5%
Test 2	280	36.8%	480	63.2%

The results indicate that the total percentage of the correct responses (72.5%) is higher than that of the incorrect ones (27.5%), which reflects the fact that undergraduate German students studying International Technical Translation are able to differentiate the spellings of the homophone. On the other hand, it is apparent that the majority of the participants were unable to give the correct answers in the production homophone test. Accordingly, the total number of their correct responses is (36.8%), whereas that of their incorrect ones is (63.2%). This signifies that the participants encountered difficulty in producing homophones.

#### 4. SOURCES OF ERRORS

Error analysis is a linguistic analysis which deals with language learners' errors to find out areas that need reinforcement in teaching (Corder, 1981). Valuable information on learners' strategies to acquire a language can be obtained from the error analysis (Dulay & Burt, 1972; Richards, 1974; Taylor, 1975). As indicated by Corder (1981), error analysis can be carried out through three stages: recognition, description, and explanation.

The stage of identifying the participants' errors was completed by comparing their answers with the

correct ones. As for the second and third stages, they are discussed in the section, which analyses the participants' errors found in the recognition homophone and production homophone tests besides the reasons beyond committing these errors. Selinker (in Richards, 1974, p.37), reported five sources of errors: a) language transfer, b) transfer of training, c) strategies of second language learning, d) strategies of second language communication and e) overgeneralization of TL linguistic material. However, most participants' of the study errors are attributed to interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, and communication strategies.

#### 4.1 Interlingual or Transfer Errors

Interlingual errors are also called transfer or interference errors are attributed to the influence of the first language or native language of learners. Language learners attempt to refer to their first language to bridge the gap of the deficiencies of their knowledge of the target language, or they assume that the target language functions like the native one. For example, the incorrect French sentence produced by an English learner *Il regarde les* (He sees them), produced according to the word order of English, instead of the correct French sentence *Il les regarde* (Literally, he them sees). This negative interference is still acknowledged as an important factor in second language learning (Kellerman, 1979). Whereas, Brown (2001) believes that first language may assist in the learning of the target language and it is not the source of errors as the word *table* that has the same meaning in both English and French.

This type of error can be detected in these words with their percentage of occurrence: *sighed* (89.5%), *tacks* (55.3%), *bored* (55.3%), and *have* (34.2%). The reason behind the participants' error is the negative effect (language transfer) of the German language in the target language which is English in this study. German Language does not have voiced plosives and fricatives in utterance initial position or in word-initial position following a voiceless sound; they are realised as voiceless plosives or fricatives in word-final position (Helbig et al., 2001; Iverson & Salmons, 1995; Jessen & Ringen, 2002; Wangler, 1974; Wiese, 1996). This phenomenon in German language is "Auslauterhärtung" (Dieling & Hirschfeld, 2000, p.28) which means final devoicing in English. The following utterances illustrate this phenomenon

- a. Hunde - Hun[t] "dogs" – "dog"
- b. Diebe - Die[p] "thieves" – "thief"
- c. Berge - Ber[k] "mountains" – "mountain"
- d. Mäu[z]e - Mau[s] "mice" – "mouse" (Grijzenhout, 2000, p.4)

Apparently, voiced plosives and fricatives in word-final position are realised as voiceless plosives and fricatives. This phenomenon of devoicing was the cause of the participants' errors in producing *sighed* /saɪd/ as *site* /

saɪt/, *tacks* /taks/ as *tags* /tags/, *bored* /bɔ:d/ as *bought* /bɔ:t/, and *have* /häv/ as *half* /hǎf/. The acquisition of German (first language) is earned unconsciously in infancy and the linguistic feature devoicing has been transmitted to the target language (English). Learners often categorise sounds in terms of the phonemic systems of their first language, making acquisition of new target language sounds difficult (Odlin, 1989).

Final devoicing in German is not the only negative effect of participants' L1 on their performance of the target language. Inter-lingual transfer results in a combination of linguistic features from the L1 and TL which occurred on different levels (Faerch & Kasper, 1983) is the other negative effect of L1. Such effect was revealed in the occurrence of *tags* instead of *tacks* and *sight* instead of *sighed*. These errors are attributed to the combination of German words with a linguistic feature from English language; the lexical meaning of *tag* /ta:k/ is "day" (www.collinsdictionary.com), the participants combined this word from their L1 with the -s plural of English to be used as an English word. As for the word *sight*, it was translated from their L1 word plural form "Visionen"/vizio:n/ meaning "vision" (www.collinsdictionary.com) to English in order to be used as an English word. The negative effect of their L1 is obvious on the participants' performance.

#### 4.2 Intralingual Transfer

The other type of errors is intralingual errors which result from faulty or partial learning of the TL, rather than from language transfer (Richards, 1974). For instance, a learner may produce *He is reads*, based on a blend of the English structures *He is reading*, *He reads*. As indicated by Richards (1971), overgeneralisation is a subdivision of intralingual errors.

Overgeneralisation is a linguistic phenomenon when learners of second or foreign language overextends in the application of previous learned rules on the target language without being learned their appropriate application. As a consequence, they commit errors in different linguistics aspects such as semantic, syntactic, or morphological. For example, children usually overgeneralise the regular English past tense (regular -ed ending) on an irregular verb, as in "goed" instead of "went" (Pinker, 1995).

Overgeneralisation errors were revealed in two erroneous words produced by the participants of the study with their percentage of occurrence: *seller* /sɛlə/ (47.4%) and *bawl* /bɔ:l/ (34.2%). The participants were asked to produce a homophone for *seller* and *bawl* instead of producing "cellar" and 'ball' as correct homophones; on the contrary, they produced "sailor" and "bowl" which are not the correct homophones for the two words. The participants, in this case, tried to derive the pronunciation behind the data to which they had been exposed, and developed mispronunciation by producing "sailor"/serlə/

instead of “cellar” /sɛlə/ and “bowl” /bəʊl/ instead of “ball” /bɔ:l/.

As a result of mispronunciation words seem to be homophones, but they are distinguishable in how they sound in reality. Such a fact will not be of any help to learners who unconsciously have learned to say these words the same and therefore find them confusing. It should be noted that overgeneralization is used by learners with the purpose of decreasing their linguistic burden.

### 4.3 Communication Strategies

Second or foreign language learners often encounter communication problems attributed to a lack of linguistic resources as they do not have the adequate knowledge to use them. In order to overcome communication problems to deliver their expected meanings, they develop communication strategies (Ellis, 1994; Littlewood, 1984; Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Some of the communication strategies which second or foreign language learners have been observed to use are paraphrasing, substitution, coining new words, and avoidance (VanPatten & Benati, 2010). These strategies cause errors in language performance. Brown (1994) considers communication strategies as a source of errors. Two types of communication strategies errors detected in this study are avoidance and coining new words.

#### 4.3.1 Avoidance

Avoidance errors occur when second or foreign language learners avoid certain syntactic structures or lexis as they present difficulty for them to produce, for the reason that they lack the linguistic resources needed. Accordingly, these learners either use simpler structures and lexis instead of the difficult ones or avoid completely producing the lexis as the findings of the study show. This type of error is the most popular source of the participants’ errors as it can be detected in these words with their percentage of occurrence: *key* (100%), *course* (100%), *whale* (95.7%), *altar* (71.1%), *slay* (65.8%), *flee* (65.8%), *hose* (57.9%), *wore* (52.6%), *hall* (50%), and *paws* (44.8%). The participants did not produce homophones for these words; they left the provided space blank. The reason beyond avoidance is the lack of English vocabulary.

#### 4.3.2 Coining New Words / Word Coinage

Language learners create a new word or phrase in order to convey the intended meaning. For example, a learner who is not aware of the lexical item “balloon” may come up with “air ball”. According to James (1998, p.149), coinage is “inventing a word from L1”. Word coinage errors committed by the participants can be detected in these words with their percentage of occurrence: *maul* (44.7%), *lyre* (44.7%), and *rap* (39.5%). These errors occurred when German students’ English repertoire did not help them to produce correct homophones.

The coined homophone for *maul* was “mawl”, a non-existence word in English; as for the coined homophone

for *lyre* were two homophones “lier” and “lyer” which do not exist in English. Finally, the coined homophone of *rap* was “rab” a weird word that was a result of L1 interference to the TL (Abdullahi-Idiagbon & Olaniyi, 2011). The effect of devoicing of plosives in German language resulted in coining a new word. The reason behind coining new words is that the participants lack the lexical of the tested homophones so they resort to word coinage.

## CONCLUSION

The present study revealed that homophones can cause a problem to undergraduate German students studying International Technical Translation as they faced difficulty in choosing the correct homophone to complete the meaning of a sentence and in writing the right homophone when they were asked to. This finding indicates that these students encounter difficulties in English language proficiency that is needed for meeting the challenges of academic coursework and communication. Another negative effect is that they will confront inconveniences with reading comprehension as a result of not identifying the meaning of numerous words, including homonyms, homophones, and homographs (Hawkes, 1972; Hudelson et al., 2003; Readence et al., 1986). They are required to understand all possible sense variations of words in the lexicon to prevail over various hindrances in communication in general and in translation in particular.

Concerning the sources of the participants’ errors, three major sources of errors were investigated. The first source is interlingual transfer, errors due to the negative influence of the participants’ L1. This type of error was apparent in the phonological phenomenon of devoicing English plosives and fricatives in a word-final position as producing *sighed* /sʌɪd/ as *site* /sʌɪt/. The other noticeable negative effect of L1 is combining German lexical items (L1) with a linguistic feature from TL (English) to produce wrong homophones as *tag* (Literary, day) was combined to –s plural of English to be used as *tags*.

The second source is intralingual transfer, errors attributed to the difficulty of the TL; this source of errors includes overgeneralization errors. Overgeneralisation is using one form or construction in one context and extending its application to other contexts where it should not apply. For instance, the production of ‘bowl’ /bəʊl/ instead of ‘ball’ /bɔ:l/ when the participants were required to give a homophone for *bawl* /bɔ:l/. The mispronounced word seems homophone, but it does not sound as it is in reality.

The third source is communication strategy, errors occur when second or foreign language learners may face difficulties when they communicate as they lack linguistic resources. Avoidance and coining new words are subdivisions of this source of errors. Avoidance errors occurred in the study when the participants entirely

avoided producing the required English homophones. For instance, they avoided producing *key*, *course*, *whale*, *altar*, etc. as they lack English vocabulary. As for coining new words, language learners create a new word or phrase to convey their intended meaning. For example, the participants of the study coined “mawl” as a homophone for *maul*; it is a non-existence word in English.

In the light of participants’ errors, error treatment should be thought of as language instructors should be aware of these errors in order for them to correct them. Additionally, they should correct errors that interfere with the general meaning and understandability of utterances. Finally, errors applicable to a pedagogical focus should receive more attention from instructors than other errors.

Referring to the English language courses that the participants have to study, only three courses of English language were assigned for them. These courses are English Grammar, Oral Skills, and English Writing with a total of 2 teaching hours per week for every course during their first year of study only. Second year students have to study for one year abroad at a university of their choice, the majority of them choose Spain or France, this will affect their English proficiency. It is recommended to add more English language courses to increase the students’ linguistic knowledge.

Finally, the present study may stimulate other researchers to start from where it ends and do extensive academic research work focused on the effect of English homophones on other English language learners.

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## APPENDIX A

### Test 1

Name:

Gender: F / M

Year of study:

Circle the correct word that gives the correct meaning from the homophones set in the sentences below.

1. The school principiale / principle spoke to a group of visitors.
2. The bride will walk down the isle / aisle with her father.
3. I bought a cinnamon role / roll for breakfast.
4. Mary held the reigns / rains / reins in her hand.
5. It was sheer / shear madness.
6. Do not tell your partners anything, they are not very discrete / discreat.
7. Tom is very old-fashioned and stayed / staid.
8. It was like pulling muscles / mussels from a shell.
9. The hawk is a bird of prey / pray.
10. The cyclist was peddling / pedalling very fast.
11. Julie is as mad as a March hair / hare.
12. Stop the idle /idol chatter and get back to work.
13. The bull gored / gourd the Toreador with his horns.
14. A cold drink of water will clear the palate / palette.
15. Brush the egg yoke /yolk mixture and place on the baking sheet.
16. Mum does not mind if I have / halve the fruit as long as I can still eat dinner.
17. One beautiful flower is flocks /phlox.
18. Mike is very vein / vane / vain and worries about his appearance all the time.
19. Caroline learned to sew / so / sow when she was twenty years old.
20. A wedding ceremony is a solemn but beautiful right / rite / wright / write.



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## APPENDIX B

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### Test 2

**Name;**

**Gender: F / M**

**Age:**

**Year of study:**

**Write a meaningful homophone for each word.**

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bawl

seller

bored

hall

flee

dear

lyre

hoses

maul

rap

paws

tacks

sighed

guessed

wore

slay

key

whale

course

altar

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